

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HEAD OF MAIL THEFT AND COUNTERFEITING RING GUILTY

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on January 23, 2003, **JUAN ANTONIO ROMERO**, (39), of Avondale, Arizona, was found guilty on an 11 count indictment that charged him with conspiracy to violate federal laws prohibiting theft and possession of stolen mail and counterfeiting and uttering counterfeit securities, and separate counts that charged him with possessing implements to counterfeit securities and possessing stolen mail, by a federal jury at Phoenix, Arizona.

The evidence at trial showed that a group of 11 West Valley residents was systematically stealing mail to get checks and financial information from May 2001 to late November 2001. They would then alter and forge personal checks, making them payable to members of the group so they could be negotiated. They took bank information from business checks and used that to create computer generated counterfeit checks on various businesses which they also cashed. The evidence also showed they used customer service phone numbers to effect telephonic transfers of funds and telephonic purchases using the stolen information.

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Nine other co-defendants pleaded guilty prior to trial. One absconded from Pretrial Release. The defendant was remanded after trial.

JUAN ANTONIO ROMERO had been charged with violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Sections 371 (Conspiracy), 513(b) (Possessing Implements for Counterfeiting Securities), and 1708 (Possession of Stolen Mail). The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Frederick J. Martone from January 14, to January 23, 2003.

A conviction for 18 U.S.C. 371 and 1708 carries a maximum penalty of 5 years, a \$250,000 fine or both. The maximum penalty for conviction of 18 U.S.C. 513(b) is 10 years, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Avondale Police Department, the Goodyear Police Department, and the Phoenix Police Department.

Sentencing is set before Judge Martone on May 19, 2003, at 1:30 PM.

The prosecution is being handled by Daniel R. Drake, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-01-1144-PHX-FJM
RELEASE NUMBER: 2003-011

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